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Vol. 12/2018

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Suggested Citation: **APA:** Herreros, F., Domenech, J. (2018). Pre-war Grievances and Violence Against Civilians in Civil Wars. Evidence from the Spanish Civil War in Catalonia, 2018. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 12, 1-20. doi: 10.4119/UNIBI/ijcv.584

Harvard: Herreros, Francisco, Domenech, Jordi. 2018. Pre-war Grievances and Violence Against Civilians in Civil Wars. Evidence from the Spanish Civil War in Catalonia, 2018. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 12: 1-20. doi: 10.4119/UNIBI/ijcv.584



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ISSN: 1864-1385

Pre-war Grievances and Violence Against Civilians in Civil Wars. Evidence from the Spanish Civil War in Catalonia

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This article argues that the role of pre-war grievances as a predictor of violence against civilians in civil wars may have been systematically underestimated because the “grievance hypothesis” has not been properly tested. Pre-war grievances can only affect civilian victimization in civil wars if they have been intensely mobilized in the lead-up to the conflict and a temporary collapse of state capacity also occurs. This article presents a “fair test” of the grievance hypothesis. It analyses in depth a specific case of a pre-war grievance that met these two conditions: conflict around land property rights in Catalonia before the Spanish Civil War and its effects on violence against civilians during the war. The results show a non-negligible effect of pre-war grievances on civilian victimization.

Keywords: conflict, civil war, violence against civilians, grievances

Acknowledgement: Francisco Herreros is grateful for support received through research project CSO2015-65969P.

Are pre-war grievances a good predictor of violence against civilians during civil war? It makes intuitive sense that people suffering from high levels of inequality, exploitation and injustice, can, under certain circumstances, turn to violence to redress their grievances. Popular explanations of revolution, violent social change and terrorism routinely rely on the notions of exploitation and injustice as powerful driving forces for violent collective action. And, yet, most recent analyses on the

causes of civil wars have systematically disregarded grievances as a relevant independent variable, while analyses on violence against civilians during civil wars have largely ignored pre-war grievances: this kind of violence is mostly considered endogenous to the conflict. While potential grievances are pervasive, there is important variation, both between and within wars, in violence against civilians.

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We will argue in this article that one possible reason for the observed no-effect of pre-war grievances on violence against civilians in civil wars is because the grievances hypothesis has not been properly tested. We propose to add two conditions that may be necessary for factually existing pre-war grievances to predict variation in violence during wars. First, an intense political mobilization of grievances in the pre-war years. And, second, a window of opportunity to direct violence against civilians. This second condition is frequent in civil war situations: there is much evidence of at least temporary loss of state capacity to police violence against civilians in civil wars, sometimes in particular regions.

This article presents a test of the grievance thesis. It analyses in depth a specific case of a pre-war grievance that met the two conditions that we believe can explicate the potential of grievances for generating violence during wars: intense pre-war mobilization and temporary collapse of state capacity. This case is the conflict around land property rights in Catalonia before the Spanish Civil War and its effects on violence against civilians during the war.

1. Theory

According to most analyses, civilian victimization in civil wars is endogenous to the war itself. In some cases, it is argued, violence is a by-product of looting that, as a reward for joining, can be decisive to insurgent groups' capacity to recruit new combatants (Collier and Hoeffler 2002). The type of resources under the control of rebel organizations and the degree of enforcement of internal discipline determine the extent to which the search for material benefits turns into violence against civilians. Similarly, Humphreys and Weinstein (2006) argue that geographical variation in civilian killings is largely determined by the internal discipline warring factions. The internal discipline of rebel organizations, in turn, usually depends on the type of resources they have access to: in an environment rich in readily available resources, rebel groups are less interested

in securing civilian cooperation, and are more willing to allow looting and other destructive behaviour in order to recruit combatants (Weinstein 2007). In the specific case of sexual violence against civilians (especially women), the internal discipline of the group and its incentives to forestall this type of violence seem also to be important variables (Wood 2008).

Another set of explanations stress territorial control and information asymmetries. According to Kalyvas (2006), variation in violence against civilians is explained by the distribution of control of the territory between warring factions. Selective violence is more likely in territories where one faction has hegemonic but not total control. Here, the dominant authority has both incentives to crush opposition and the capacity to protect informants. By contrast, in zones where control is evenly divided between two factions, selective violence is not possible, because the factions are unable to credibly protect informants. In those zones, any violence that occurs will be indiscriminate.¹ The explanation of violence as a consequence of competition between warring factions for control of territory makes more sense in irregular civil wars, less in more conventional cases. Herreros and Criado (2009) have advocated two logics of violence against civilians in conventional civil wars: arbitrary violence as a consequence of the collapse of the state and preemptive violence targeting the rear areas. According to Balcells (2010, 2017) violence against civilians in conventional civil wars is not just a way to secure control of territory, but to obtain political dominance over political rivals. As the application of violence is costly (in terms of international backlash, retaliation or local uprisings in response), violence against civilians will be greater where support is evenly divided between warring factions, and a comparatively small number of killings can tilt the balance.

Pre-war grievances are notably absent from these analyses of civilian victimization in civil wars. Violence is the consequence of war dynamics: either a by-product of the combat itself, or a strategy to gain control of territory or to obtain political dominance in territory already controlled. Violence can

¹ This equilibrium is likely to change, though, when there are more than two warring factions, as was the case in the West Bank and Gaza in 2006–2008. When there are more than two actors, the strongest (in this case, Israel) will be able to apply selective violence in zones under the hegemonic control of the other two

(Bhavnani et al. 2011). A recent study on the Algerian civil war, in turn, concluded that selective violence was actually greater where control was split between government and rebel forces (Hagelstein 2008).

also take the form of retaliation for grievances generated during the war, in a process potentially descending into a spiral of violence (Balcells 2017). Pre-war grievances seem simply too pervasive to explain major cross-sectional and time-series variation in violence. Many groups experience economic and political inequality and discrimination, but not all of them resort to violence during civil war. There are some analyses, though, that include pre-war grievances as an important explanatory variable to explain civil war outbreaks (not so much violence against civilians during the war). These exceptions include Costalli and Ruggeri (2015) on the role of emotions such as indignation derived from pre-war grievances and participation in partisan groups during the Italian Civil War of 1943–45, and Cederman et al. (2013) on the role of horizontal inequalities and the systematic exclusion of ethnic groups from government in triggering civil war.

In this article we will test whether, under certain circumstances, pre-war grievances can contribute to explaining war-time violence against civilians. By civilians we mean non-combatants, and the type of violence we are referring to is direct violence against civilians. One possible reason for the mismatch between the number of aggrieved groups and the number of episodes of violence against civilians – and one that has not been thoroughly tested so far – is that not all groups that suffer from inequalities or discrimination are equally mobilized before the outbreak of the war. Collective action theory tells us that material resources, the presence of political entrepreneurs and a window of opportunity for political mobilization are all important activators of social movements. Only when these conditions are met, do grievances become salient. Salient grievances, in turn, can lead endogenously to polarization and conflict escalation. In the rest of this section we will explain how grievances could partly explain violence once a country is immersed in a civil war.

First of all, grievances can generate certain emotions in the aggrieved party. If a person feels cheated, this can trigger emotions such as anger and indignation (De Francisco 2014). These two emotions are closely linked to the desire to punish the cheater. Punishment of defectors has been extensively documented in numerous experiments using collective action games such as the Prisoner's Dilemma, the Trust Game or the

Public Goods Game (Fehr and Gächter 2000; Putterman 2014). In some cases, this punishment is even altruistic, in the sense that the punisher assumes the cost of punishing the opportunist without deriving any material benefits, even in the form of reputation gains. There is abundant evidence from neuroscience, though, that the punisher actually experiences a pleasure effect – located in the dorsal striatum – when retrieving what he or she sees as unjust and/or opportunistic behaviour (see De Quervain et al. 2004). The literature on political violence also provides evidence on the role of emotions in violent collective action. According to Wood (2003), an emotional response to a perceived injustice seemed to be the main driving force of peasants' decisions to support guerrilla forces in the civil war in El Salvador. Although many of them participated in social movements calling for economic and social reform in the years before the war, moral commitments, outrage and defiance – rather than material incentives – seemed to be the paramount reasons for participation in the war (especially given that most of them apparently thought that victory was very unlikely) (Wood 2003, 18). According to Korf's (2005) analysis of the war in Sri Lanka, the fight for justice was a powerful motivation for violent individual and collective action. Costalli and Ruggeri (2015), in turn, have shown a connection between powerful emotions such as indignation and participation in the partisan movement in Italy in 1943–45.

Political mobilization by political entrepreneurs can have several effects on the likelihood of violence being used against those regarded as responsible for injustice. It can, firstly, reinforce the subjective perception of injustice. Secondly, it can generate anger and indignation in people without direct experience of the grievance. Political mobilization provides information about the injustice to other members of the community. Even if they have not experienced the injustice themselves, they are more likely to feel anger and indignation and, as a consequence, a desire to punish the perpetrator, if the grievance have been made salient by a political entrepreneur. Thirdly, the political entrepreneur provides an ideological framework for interpretation of the grievance that offers a broader justification – in terms of the common good of the community, for example – for the desire to redress the injustice

and for the means – including violent ones – to do so. Therefore, while the injustice itself is enough to trigger anger and indignation in those who experience it, mobilization by political entrepreneurs makes these grievances more salient for those who have not directly experienced it and can supply ideological justification for the desire to punish those held responsible (and provide the means to do so). A group of people may suffer from economic, political or social discrimination, but unless these grievances have been mobilized and made salient during the years prior to the conflict they will probably not lead to violence during a subsequent war. Violent riots in India, for instance, did not derive automatically from existing ethnic divisions between Hindus and Muslims, but from prerequisites including the presence of political entrepreneurs willing to mobilize the ethnic-religious issue to divert popular support away from class politics (Wilkinson 2004). Ethnic polarization per se does not lead to violence; indeed, if variation is allowed in levels of issue salience among individuals, equal levels of ethnic polarization can lead to different outcomes of conflict onset (Bhavnani and Miodownik 2009). Once the issue has been mobilized, political entrepreneurs can be willing to use violence to extract rents – for example, political support from the aggrieved population, as in the case of India. In the case of the Rwandan genocide, coalitions of local actors mobilized the Hutu population against the Tutsis and adopted a policy of killing as a way of consolidating their power (see Straus 2008). In many poor countries in transition to democracy, mobilization of aggressive ethnic nationalism has served the interests of groups and political entrepreneurs willing to exclude ethnic minorities, the working class, rival elites and other political opponents from political participation. Slobodan Milosevic's mobilization of Serb nationalism served both to gather popular support for threatened elites of the former one-party state and to demobilize support for the liberal opposition (Snyder 2000). In other cases, violence can be seen as a way to settle disputes, for example around property rights. The killing of the

adversary can be seen as a way to settle the matter once and for all.

Finally, the opportunity to redress perceived injustices can lead from grievances through political mobilization to violence. In some cases, especially during civil wars, this is related to a temporary collapse or deterioration of state capacity. When the state retains its monopoly of force, illegal violence is subject to state sanctions. The costs attached to violence diminish drastically when state authority collapses. And partial or total state collapse is a frequent event in civil wars. In the Bosnian civil war, for example, it has been argued that the “security dilemmas” derived from the collapse of the state explains most of the violence (see for example Hardin 1995 and Walter 1999). In the case of Rwanda, the crisis of state authority after the assassination of president Habyarimana created a “window of opportunity” that allowed the strategic use of violence by local elites in some areas, sometimes in coordination with elements of the army (Straus 2008).² In 1943–45 Italy, political violence was facilitated by state failure after the armistice with the allies and German occupation (Costalli and Ruggeri 2015). There is also some evidence that a specific form of political violence, rape by insurgent groups, is more prevalent in situations of partial state collapse (Cohen 2013). In this context of state collapse, we argue, salient grievances can predict violence – alongside endogenous wartime revenges and common criminality. Going beyond the usual understanding of the effects of state collapse on violence against civilians, we argue that the presence of mobilized pre-war grievances in interaction with the partial collapse of the state that normally follows civil war outbreaks can partly explain violence against civilians during civil wars.

In our paper we focus on the case of a specific pre-war grievance: contested property rights in Catalonia during the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39, and its influence on violence against civilians during the war. It is important to stress that we are not trying to explain all political

² Additionally, the deterioration of state authority and the parallel collapse of the cost of illegal behavior can be associated with individual-level violence in terms of vengeance and criminality. In this sense, there is evidence of an increase of criminality and private vengeance in zones where a civil war has debilitated state

authority, as in Chechnya (Andienko and Shelley 2005) and Colombia (Sánchez et al. 2005). In Mexico, rural violence is also more pervasive in remote areas where state enforcement is weak (Villarreal 2004).

violence in Catalonia during the war, but to explore the correlation between a specific pre-war grievance and violence. The case analysis will allow us to draw conclusions about the role of pre-war grievances in generating violence against civilians. The case exhibits the two conditions for a fair test of the grievance hypothesis: it was heavily mobilized during the immediate pre-war years, and a window of opportunity that severely diminished the costs of applying violence opened during the first four months of the war.

During the Spanish Second Republic (1931–36) open elections and free political participation were possible for the first time in the country's history. The result, however, was not a consolidated and stable democracy, but a high level of political instability. The Second Republic, in this sense, could be considered a good example of how weak democratic institutions and opportunistic political entrepreneurs can lead to political instability and conflict during transitions to democracy (Snyder and Jervis 1999). In the specific case of Catalonia during the Second Republic, the conflict over property rights between “rabassaires” (sharecroppers) and landowners – spurred by the phylloxera wine blight that devastated European vineyards in the late nineteenth century – led to unprecedented levels of mobilization by political parties (Esquerra Republicana) and tenants’ unions (Unió de Rabassaires) during the 1930s. This case is also characterized by the existence of favourable conditions for collective action: a collective of sharecroppers with a certain level of material resources, living in relatively small and equal communities, coupled with the presence of political entrepreneurs from political parties with an electoral incentive to mobilize these communities around the issue of property rights. These favourable conditions are reflected in the development of “rabassaire” unions such as the Unió de Treballadors del Camp and the Lliga de Viticultors Rabassaires de Catalunya beginning in the 1870s and culminating in the creation of the Unió de Rabassaires in 1922 (Pomés 2000). Political conditions in 1930s Spain also favoured political mobilization and collective action, and the temporary collapse of state authority in the first months of the civil war created a window of opportunity for violence. Whether and how

the presence of this highly mobilized pre-war grievance affected violence against civilians during the civil war is the subject of this article.

2. Historical Background: The Case of the Rabassa Morta in Catalonia and the Spanish Civil War

The Rabassa Morta conflict between rabassaires (sharecroppers) and landowners in the Catalan vineyards began at the end of the nineteenth century, after the phylloxera epidemic wiped out all the vines and ended the customary Rabassa Morta contracts (which were often several centuries old), and, therefore, to the need to negotiate new contracts. In general terms, the post-phylloxera contracts were detrimental for the sharecroppers (Giralt 1964, 60), although Carmona and Simpson (1999) dispute this. From the 1870s and 1880s, as noted before, the conflict between landowners and sharecroppers became increasingly mobilized through the creation of *rabassaire* unions. The *Unió de Rabassaries*, created in 1922, became the main instrument for the mobilization of sharecroppers’ grievances.

The mobilization of the “rabassaire question” reached new heights during the Spanish Second Republic (1931–36). Ambitious land reform laws adopted by the Republican-socialist government in 1932 and by the left-wing Popular Front government in 1936 were generally detrimental to large landowners and beneficial to landless peasants. In the same spirit, the Republic also passed several laws in favour of rural tenant farmers. The 1931 tenancy law altered the conditions of tenancy contracts, freezing rents and protecting tenants from evictions. Although the law did not actually target rabassa morta contracts, Catalan sharecroppers nonetheless used the new legal framework to mobilize to improve their contracts. Stretching the interpretation of the tenancy law of 1931, sharecroppers now petitioned for a lower share of the harvest to be given to the landowners, which led to a wave of more than 30,000 petitions to revise the conditions of sharecropping contracts, most of them dismissed by the courts (Generalitat de Catalunya, *Els contractes de conreu*). Landowners retaliated, evicting or reporting sharecroppers who refused to pay their full share of the harvest.

In Autonomous Catalonia, a progressive government led by Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Catalonian Republican Left) and with close contacts with rabassaire unions reformed the law on tenancy and sharecropping contracts in April 1934, but the legislation was declared unconstitutional by the Spanish Constitutional Court (Tribunal de Garantías Constitucionales). In October, the Catalan government declared a general strike (which was also declared by left-wing forces in other parts of Spain at the same time) and unilaterally declared the “Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic” (Casanova 2007, 129). Many local councils also declared the “Estat Català” (Catalan State).

Yet things quickly turned sour for the Catalan revolutionaries as the centre-right government in Madrid ordered the repression of the Catalan uprising with the intervention of the army and the Guardia Civil (Civil Guard, the main security force of the state). The government suspended Catalan autonomy and annulled the Catalan law of rural contracts. More than three thousand people were arrested and the Catalan President Lluís Companys was sentenced to thirty years in prison. The top officials of the Catalan security forces (mossos d’esquadra and somaten) were sentenced to death, although the penalty was later commuted (Casanova 2007, 139–40).

Amid the repression of the sharecroppers’ movement, landowners had a free hand to evict militant sharecroppers (Unió de Rabassaires, 1935). Around 1,400 *rabassaires* were evicted between October 1934 and November 1935 (Giral 1964, 70), thanks to the provisions of the new Law on Rural Contracts approved by the Spanish parliament in May 1935 (López Esteve 2013).³ In December 1935, the Unió de Rabassaires, the main rabassaire union, declared that “the peasants will not forget the injustices they were suffering under these new policies” (López Esteve 2013, 378–79). The following examples illustrate the point: In Collbató a sharecropper who had worked the same plot of land for twenty-one years as a rabassaire and twelve as a sharecropper under a *parceria* contract was evicted immediately after the October events. The landowner kept the entire harvest and uprooted all the vines

planted by the sharecropper (Unió Rabassaires, 1935, 68–69). In Llorenç del Penedés, a sharecropper worked the land under a *rabassa morta* contract that was more than one hundred years old. After the 6th October, the sharecropper received a judicial communication requesting the payment of 1,100 pesetas. Even though he paid the required amount, he was evicted nonetheless (Unió Rabassaires 1935, 101). In Montcada i Reixac, the rabassas of twenty-nine rabassaires with seventy-year leases expired in 1931. Initially, the owner did not request the rabassaires to leave the land, perhaps in light of the political climate in the early years of the Republic. He did so however after the suspension of Catalan autonomy in October 1934 (Unió Rabassaires, 108–13). There were isolated episodes of violence between evicted sharecroppers and landowners: for example the assassination of a landowner by an evicted sharecropper in the village of Blancafort in June 1935, or an armed confrontation between peasants and landowners in the village of Solivella (Mayayo 1986, 397–98).

The electoral victory of the Popular Front (a coalition of socialists, communists and left-wing republicans) in February 1936 turned the tables against the landowners. Land reform was immediately accelerated, through a number of decrees and ex-post legalizations of illegally occupied lands. The autonomy of the Catalan government was reinstated and the Generalitat, once again under the control of Esquerra Republicana, re-established the law on tenancy and sharecropping contracts (“law of *conreus*”) of 1934, which was very favourable to sharecroppers’ interests. Republican and left-wing mayors were reinstated.

After five months of Popular Front government, a significant section of the armed forces led by prominent senior officers including General Franco staged a coup d’état in July 1936. The coup only succeeded in half of the territory, and, crucially, failed in the two main Spanish cities, Madrid and Barcelona. The partial failure of the military coup led to a three-year civil war (1936–39) that ended in the victory of the forces led by General Franco over the Republican government. Catalonia remained a Republican stronghold for most of the war and was

³ Despite these evictions, landowners seem not to have tried to replace tenants with wage labourers (see Domenech and Herreros 2017)

not fully occupied by the Francoist forces until February 1939, just two months before the fall of the last Republican territory. This war, unlike most civil wars, was largely conventional (according to Kalyvas (2005), it is actually prime example of a conventional civil war). The Spanish Civil War was fought by two conventional armies of considerable size (around one million and a half combatants altogether in 1938) on mostly stable fronts. Neither the government nor the rebels encouraged guerrilla warfare.

Instrumental in the defeat of the attempted coup in July 1936 were both loyal members of the security forces (especially, members of the mostly Republican *Guardia de Asalto* – Assault Guard) and militias from the main political parties and unions of the left. The success of the coup d'état in parts of the territory and the Republican government's decision on 19 July to hand over arms to the militias in order to defeat the rebels (Graham 2005, 78) led to a partial breakdown of state authority in the Republican territory, especially in the first four months of the war. In a few places, such as Murcia, Almería and Alicante, where there was no coup or it was easily crushed, state authorities and local police loyal to the Republic remained largely in control (Ledesma 2010), but, according to many sources, the state temporarily fell apart in most of the rest of the territory (Juliá 1999; Graham 2002; Ledesma 2003; Casanova 2007), or, at least, saw its authority severely diminished (Ruiz 2013, 22). According to Graham (2002, 81), “many middle class republican functionaries and elected officials prevaricated or ‘went missing’, fleeing their public responsibilities. The judiciary collapsed. From the ministries down to municipal and village councils, the State was ceasing to function.”

The breakdown of the state was also apparent in Catalonia. The militias largely replaced the state security forces (a process facilitated by the Catalan government's 21 July 1936 order to all Catalan Civil Guard detachments to concentrate in Barcelona) and the judiciary was initially suspended and subsequently supplanted by so-called “popular courts”. During the first months those town councils that managed to survive at all were subordinated to local committees (Pozo 2002, 10; Martín 2012, 26) composed of parties and unions of the Popular Front: anarchists, socialists, communists, Trotskyists, and also

members of *Esquerra Republicana* and the *Unió de Rabassaires*, the main “rabasaire” union traditionally linked to *Esquerra*. In small and middle-size towns, the Catalan autonomous state virtually ceased to exist. During the first months of the war the government even lost contact with provincial capitals, especially Lleida where the revolutionary organizations forcibly seized the security forces headquarters (Pozo 2002, 76–79).

The above narrative shows why Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War offers an ideal case for our test of the grievances hypothesis. There was an identifiable pre-war grievance: contested property rights between landowners and sharecroppers. This conflict had a long history of mobilization since the creation of the first *rabassaire* unions in the 1870s, probably, as already noted, because local conditions for collective action were favourable. The grievance was made salient during the years immediately prior to the war, when relatively free expression of political demands was permitted during the Republican period. Its salience was further heightened by conflicts around land legislation adopted by left-wing governments in both Madrid and Barcelona. This conflict left a history of political violence during the Republic in terms of riots, arrests, and evictions of sharecroppers. There was, furthermore, an opportunity for extra-legal violence during the first months after the failure of the coup d'état, when the state's infrastructure temporarily crumbled in Catalonia. Actually, most of the killings of civilians in the Republican territory, including Catalonia, took place during the months from July to November 1936 (Solé i Sabaté and Vilarroya 1990). We thus find in this case the ideal conditions for a fair test of the grievances hypothesis. It is that to which we now turn.

3. Data

3.1. Violence in Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War

Levels of violence against civilians in the Spanish Civil War were relatively high, especially compared to other “classical” civil wars, such as the American Civil War. The two sides killed at least 120,000 civilians between them (of these, roughly 50,000 were killed in Republican territory) (Herreros and Criado 2009). For the case of Catalonia, we rely on the data on civilians killed during the war in the Republican rearward from

Solé i Sabaté and Vilarroya (1990). Our dependent variable is aggregated civilian deaths in around one thousand Catalan municipalities excluding Barcelona.⁴ These deaths were the result of trials and summary executions in the rear areas, so the deceased were non-combatants (they were neither members of any of the militias that populated the Catalan territory in the first months of the war nor soldiers of the regular Republican army and security forces, and they were not killed in combat). We have restricted the analysis to those killed in the period July to November 1936. These are the months where the state authority in Catalonia was at its lowest ebb. After November, the state began a slow process of reimposing its authority across the Republican territory. In August 1936 the Republican government created the Popular Courts, with the intention of eliminating uncontrolled violence, but in Catalonia these courts did not begin work until October (Graham 2002, 160). It was also October when the Republican government put into motion the process of creating the Popular Army (to replace the militias) (Cardona 2006, 52), although in the case of Catalonia this process was singularly slow (Viñas 2006, 347). It

was during these months of relatively weak state authority that a window of opportunity opened for extra-legal violence.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of violence against civilians in proportion to population in Catalonia in the period July–November 1936, aggregated at municipality level.

The data in the map refers to number of deaths per population in the locality where each victim was killed. Other studies on violence against civilians in Catalonia have considered deaths by victim's birthplace.

This ignores labour market fluidity and significant population mobility in those years. One potential bias in attributing deaths to the place of execution is that prisoners detained elsewhere could have been brought there to be tried and subsequently executed. If this were the case, we would not be capturing the effects of local conditions on the variation of violence against civilians. However, this is not problematic for the period under analysis. It was not until 1937 that judicial procedures were centralized under the control of state authorities in Catalonia

Figure 1: Civilians killed in Catalonia, July–November 1936

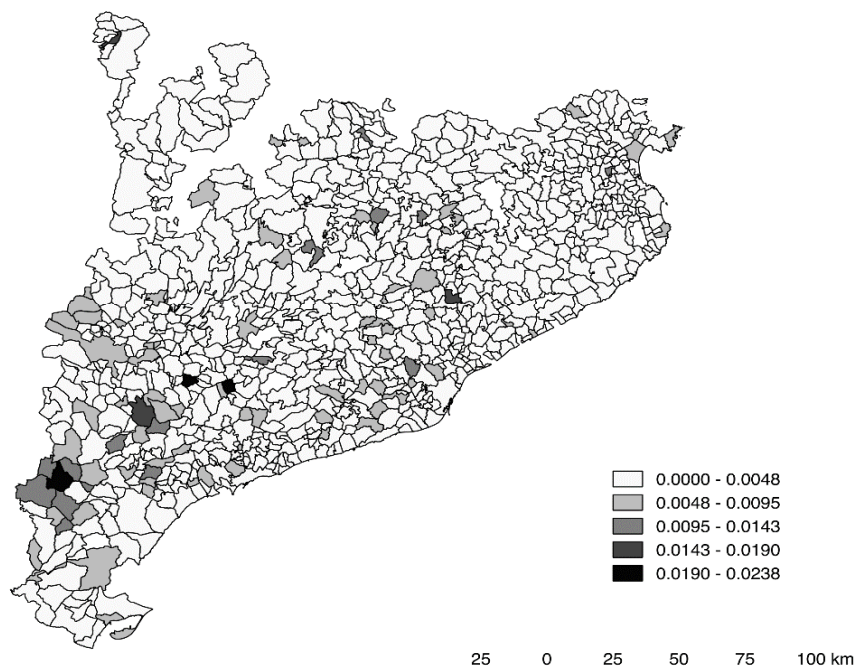
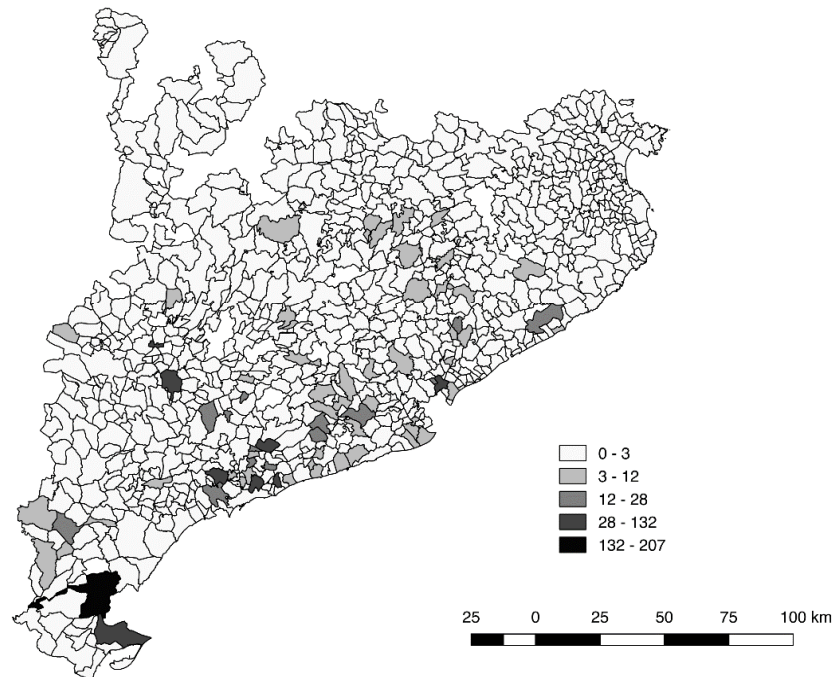


Figure 2: Evictions of rabassaires (1935)



(one example the trial in Barcelona of Trotskyists and anarchists after May 1937). In July–November 1936, a period where militias and local committees were hegemonic, victims of violence were generally killed on the spot. We have also excluded the victims of anti-clerical violence, as we believe that this type of violence follows its own logic and could bias the analysis.

4.1. Pre-war Grievances: Data on the Rabassaire Conflict

Our main indicator for pre-war grievances associated to the rabassaire conflict is evictions of tenants and sharecroppers after October 1934 (Unió de Rabassaires 1935). As a second indicator we use lawsuits filed by rabassaires for revision of contracts in 1932 (Generalitat de Catalunya 1933).

Both variables are connected to pre-civil war mobilization of the grievances experienced by the *rabasser* sharecroppers.

This connection is especially clear in the case of evictions. After hundreds of sharecroppers were evicted from their plots in 1935, the issue was strongly mobilized by the sharecropper union Unió de Rabassaires and the political party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya in the February 1936 elections. There were also isolated acts of violence between evicted sharecroppers and landowners in the months before the war. This means that the variable “evictions” captures intense mobilization in the months immediately prior to the war. The geographical distribution of evictions across villages is shown in Figure 2. Lawsuits serve as an indicator because, as we have already mentioned, thousands of lawsuits for revision of sharecropper contracts were systematically rejected by the courts in 1932. This variable is probably a poorer indicator of mobilization than evictions, as it refers to events that occurred four years prior to the war.

As we argue in the theoretical section, those who held pre-war grievances were able to take advantage of the opportunities for extra-legal violence opened up by the war. Violence can be carried out individually or through organizations. The main sharecroppers' organization was the *Unió de Rabassaires*. If the violence was at least in part collective, we would expect, firstly, that it would be more prevalent in areas where there was a local branch of the *rabassaire* union. Secondly, we would expect to see an interaction effect between the presence of the *rabassaire* union and the intensity of the grievance on violence. In those places where the *Unió de Rabassaires* had a local branch, it would have been easier to organize collective violence to redress those grievances. The source for this variable (presence of a local branch of the *Unió de Rabassaires*) is Pomes (2000).

The summary statistics of these and other independent variables included in the models are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Evictions 1935	1.321	8.703	0	207	1028
Lawsuits 1932	12.796	76.875	0	1290	1019
Union 1933	0.183	0.386	0	1	1027
Population 1930	1722.715	3760.093	73	44417	1028
Right-wing vote 1936	48.015	16.825	2.7	100	1021
CNT 1931	116.523	930.220	0	15986	1028
CNT 1936	37.922	269.755	0	6130	1028
Competition1936	0.885	0.156	0	1	1023
Border front	0.228	0.420	0	1	1011
Elevation	363.870	316.397	3	1539	869
Distance to Barcelona	92.362	40.314	6.3	252	1009

Table 1 includes several control variables that the literature on political violence and secondary literature on the Spanish

Civil War suggest are related to violence against civilians. Balcells (2010, 2017) shows the closeness of competition in the 1936 general election to be an important determinant of violence against civilians in Catalonia during the war. The index of competitiveness is:

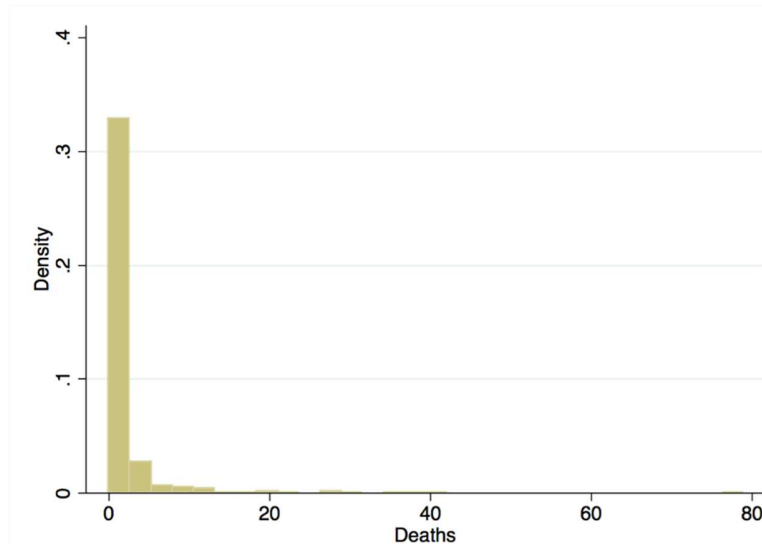
$$1-(\%VoteLeft36-\%VoteRight36)^2.$$

Votes for right-wing parties in the February 1936 Spanish parliamentary elections supply an indicator of potential opposition to the incumbent's rule. While all rear territory was in principle under the control of the Republican forces, this control could have been considered shakier in those areas where pre-war support for political forces that had supported the coup d'état was higher. In these areas where there are potentially more opponents, there was a possibility to apply preemptive violence against potential political entrepreneurs (Herreros and Criado 2009). Some authors, such as Ruiz (2013) argue that much of the violence in Republican territory was driven by a perception that the rearguard was full of enemies

of the Republic that had to be suppressed in order to consolidate control of the territory. According to this, we would expect more violence in areas where support for right-wing candidates was stronger. "Border front" is another variable related to the strategic control theory. When a town is close to the battlefield, the opposition forces in the rearguard can count on the support of the enemy on the other side of the line. In these areas, therefore, opposition to the Republican forces' control of the territory would be more likely. In terms of Kalyvas' theory (2006), these would be places where control of the territory is hegemonic but not com-

plete, which, in turn, would generate incentives for further repression. We include two variables related to the strength of the state: elevation and distance to Barcelona. The weakness

Figure 3. Histogram for number of deaths



of the state is, according to the literature, a strong predictor of civil conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Laitin 2007). Mountainous terrain is considered a proxy of state weakness (see for example Fearon and Laitin 2003). The rationale is that the reach of state power is weaker in mountainous areas because communication with the centre is more difficult. The same logic applies to the variable “Distance to Barcelona”: state control would be weaker the farther a town is from the capital.

The models include another control variable: militants of the anarchist union CNT per village. According to most historians, the militias formed by the CNT were responsible for many killings of civilians in the Republican rearguard. There is numerous anecdotal evidence on killings by anarchist militias across Republican territory, and especially in Catalonia, which was the

89). We have data on CNT membership for two periods: in 1931, the inaugural year of the Spanish Second Republic (when the anarchist union was at its strongest), and in 1936, from the Anarchist Congress of Zaragoza, carried out just two months before the outbreak of the civil war.⁵

4. Empirical Strategy

The “grievance hypothesis” proposes that pre-war grievances are a predictor of violence against civilians during the war. We add two conditions to this basic hypothesis: pre-war grievances have to have been politically mobilized in the years immediately prior to the war, and a window of opportunity has to have opened to apply extra-legal violence. The

case of the rabassaire conflict in Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War meets these two extra conditions. Concretely, we consider the following specific hypotheses on the effects of grievances on violence in the Catalan case:

H1: Violence will be higher in villages with pre-war grievances related to the rabassaire question.

H2: The presence of rabassaire organizations will increase the probability of violence against civilians during the war.

H3: Violence against civilians is expected to be higher in villages where there were both pre-war grievances related to the rabassaire question and a local branch of the rabassaire union.

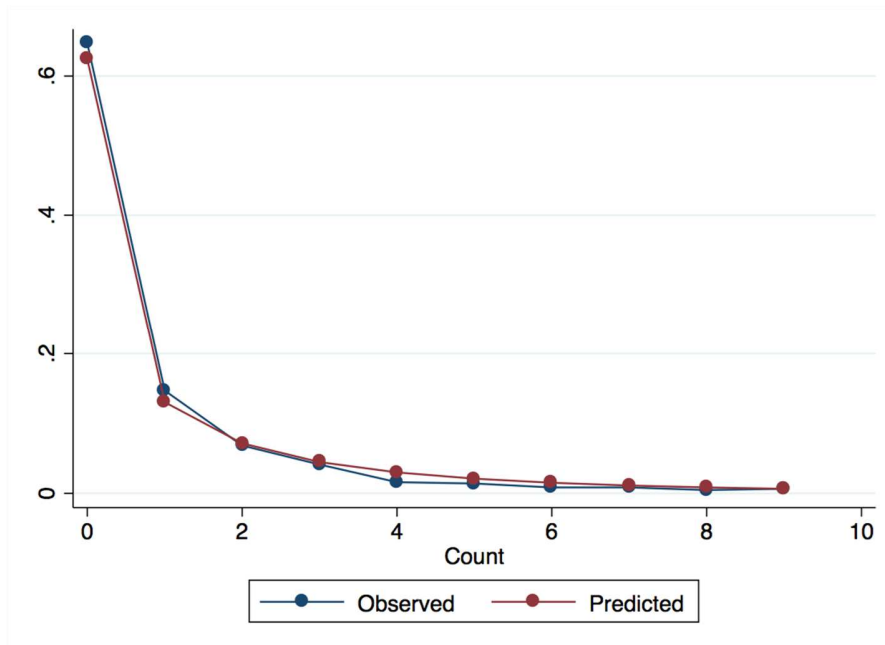
These hypotheses were tested using the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{prob}(Y_i) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{evictions}_i + \beta_2 \text{arrested}_i + \beta_3 \text{lawsuits}_i + \beta_4 \text{rightwing}_i \\ & + \beta_4 \text{population}_i + \beta_5 \text{elevation}_i + \beta_6 \text{competition}_i + \beta_7 \text{union}_i \\ & + \beta_8 \text{distanceBCN}_i + \beta_9 \text{Borderfront}_i + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

main anarchist stronghold in 1936 (see for example Casanova 1999, 129; Martín 2012, 33, 34, 109; Ledesma 2010, 188–

⁵ Sources: for 1931, Cucó Giner 1970; for 1936, Solidaridad Obrera, 6 May 1936

Figure 4: Predicted vs. observed counts, negative binomial models for number of deaths



Y_i is number of civilian deaths per village. The independent variables in the model are those discussed in the previous section. As our dependent variable is number of deaths, we estimated a negative binomial count model. The significant likelihood ratio test for $\alpha=0$ indicated that a negative binomial model is preferred to a Poisson model (our outcome count variable is overdispersed). As can be seen in Figure 3, the count variable has an excessive number of zeros, and a significant z-test indicates that the zero-inflated negative binomial model is preferred to the ordinary negative binomial regression.

The negative binomial models are clearly a good fit, as shown in Figure 4, which compares predicted with observed counts.

As additional tests for the above hypotheses, we estimated models with a dichotomous independent variable for grievances (evictions) and a model with an interaction term between grievances and the existence of a local branch of the *rabassaire* union.

5. Results

In order to gauge the effect of pre-war grievances on violence, we analyse first the Spearman rank-order correlations of the various counts of events in Table 2. It is clear from the analysis that at least one of the pre-war dimensions of conflict, evictions of *rabassaires* in 1935, can be

linked to lethal violence against civilians, while the other, litigation, is not significantly correlated.

This is also the case for the variable for the presence of a *rabassaire* union in 1933. Right-wing vote shows a negative correlation, which means that violence was actually lower in right-wing strongholds. The two variables associated to the strength of state control – distance to Barcelona and elevation – are both negatively related to violence, contrary to expectations.

Table 3 shows a multivariate analysis of the determinants of violence against civilians in July–November 1936.

Table 2: Spearman rank correlations, violence against civilians (July–November 1936).

	Left-wing violence	Lit.	Eviction	Union 1933	CNT 1931	CNT 1936	Comp.	Right- wing	Pop.	Dist. BCN	Border
Litigation	0.06										
Evictions	0.18*	0.09*									
Union 1933	0.21*	0.20*	0.41*								
CNT 1931	0.28*	0.04	0.11*	0.16*							
CNT 1936	0.25*	-0.009	0.08*	.12*							
Comp.	0.10*	-0.05*	0.04	0.04	-0.009						
Right-wing	-0.07*	-0.17*	-0.02	-0.12*	-0.13*	-0.14*	0.17*				
Population	0.36*	0.16*	0.24*	0.28*	0.36*	0.42*	0.11*	-0.15*			
Distance BCN	-0.20*	-0.16*	-0.28*	-0.50*	-0.19*	-0.06*	0.01	-0.12*	-0.11*		
Border	-0.10*	-0.07*	-0.12*	-0.24*	-0.10	0.01	0.04	-0.09*	0.11*	0.63*	
Elevation	-0.18*	-0.10*	-0.07*	-0.11*	-0.15*	-0.18*	-0.02*	0.20*	-0.25*	0.10*	0.08*

Models 1 to 3 show that several of the bivariate correlations in Table 2 do not stand the test of the multivariate analysis. Models 1 and 2 include the two indicators of grievances separately, while Model 3 includes both at the same time. Litigation does not have a discernible effect on violence against civilians. The positive relation between evictions and violence, however, remains. The probability of violence is higher in villages where *rabassaire* sharecroppers were evicted after the failure of the proclamation of the Catalan State in October 1934. This effect stands if we operationalize evictions as a dummy variable (with value 1 for villages where at least one sharecropper was evicted and value 0 where there were no evictions), as we do in Model 4.

The effect of evictions on civilian deaths in the war is shown in Figure 5. There is a small but significant effect: from 1.39 predicted deaths in villages without evictions to 2.65 deaths in those villages that suffered twenty evictions, with all the remainder variables at their means. This result clearly supports our first hypothesis, which proposes an effect of a pre-war grievance on civilian victimization during the war.

The models also show, in accordance with our second hypothesis, that the presence of a *rabassaire* union is associated with increased probability of civilian deaths, which suggests

that perhaps at least part of the violence was carried out through collective organizations. The presence of the revolutionary anarchist union CNT does not in fact have any effect on number of civilians executed, contrary to most of the historical literature, while the presence of the *rabassaire* union does. This effect remains even if we estimate the models using CNT affiliation in 1931 (not shown in Table 3), when the anarchist union was considerably stronger. The size of the effect of the presence of a local branch of the *rabassaire* union on number of civilians killed is seen in Figure 6. While the expected number of deaths (with all the other variables at their means) is 1.35 in localities without a local branch of the *rabassaire* union, the equivalent figure for localities with one is 1.97.

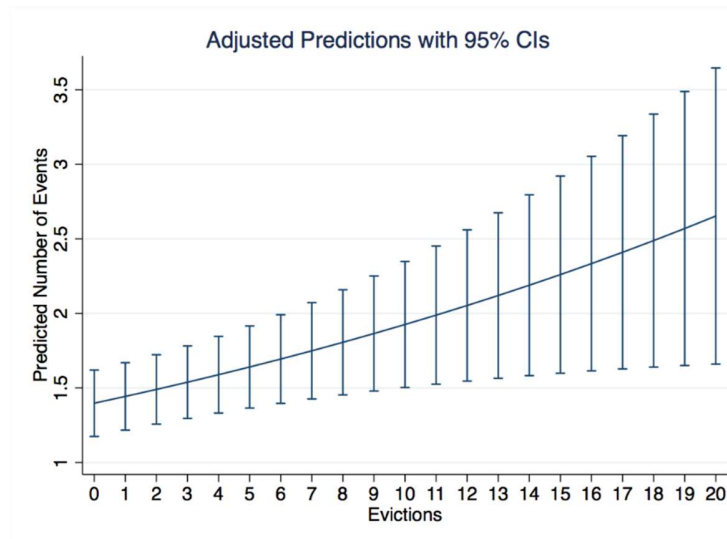
This idea acquires further support from Model 5, which includes an interaction between evictions and the presence of a local branch of the *Unió de Rabassaires* to test our third hypothesis. In villages that experienced evictions in the months previous to the war and also had a local branch of the sharecroppers' union, the probability of violence against civilians was higher than in villages without a union organization. This effect is captured in Figure 7.

Table 3: Pre-war grievances and violence against civilians in Catalonia (July-November 1936).

Zero-inflated Negative Binomial Models

	1	2	3	4	5
Negative Binomial					
Population 1930	0.0001*** (0.00002)	0.0001*** (0.00004)	0.0001*** (0.00002)	0.0001*** (0.00002)	0.0001*** (0.00001)
Evictions 1935	0.03*** (0.009)		0.03*** (0.009)	0.54** (0.18)	-0.005 (0.005)
Litigation 1932		-0.0007 (0.0007)	-0.0002 (0.0007)		
Unions 1933	0.37** (0.18)	0.63*** (0.18)	0.38** (0.18)	0.38** (0.18)	0.22 (0.17)
Unions1933*Evictions1935					0.06*** (0.01)
Competition 1936	1.45** (0.53)	1.25** (0.56)	1.42** (0.54)	1.29** (0.54)	1.47** (0.52)
CNT 1936	0.00006 (0.0003)	0.0003 (0.0004)	0.0005 (0.0003)	0.0003 (0.0004)	-0.00009 (0.0002)
Right-wing vote 1936	-0.001** (0.0005)	-0.01** (0.005)	-0.01** (0.005)	-0.01** (0.005)	-0.01** (0.005)
Distance to Barcelona	0.005** (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)
Border front	-0.40 (0.27)	-0.23 (0.28)	-0.39 (0.27)	-0.42 (0.23)	-0.37 (0.27)
Elevation	-0.001** (0.0003)	-0.001*** (0.0003)	-0.001** (0.0003)	-0.001*** (0.0003)	-0.0009** (0.0003)
Constant	-0.70 (0.59)	-0.35 (0.63)	-0.64 (0.61)	-0.60 (0.60)	-0.70 (0.57)
Logit					
Right-wing vote 1936	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
Distance to Barcelona	0.02** (0.007)	0.02** (0.007)	0.02** (0.007)	0.02** (0.008)	0.02** (0.007)
Border Front	0.29 (0.63)	0.51 (0.64)	0.28 (0.64)	0.28 (0.70)	0.28 (0.57)
Elevation	-0.0007 (0.0009)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.0007 (0.0009)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.0004 (0.0008)
Constant	-0.04 (1.10)	0.31 (1.13)	-0.009 (1.10)	0.05 (1.19)	-0.10 (0.99)
LnAlpha	0.68*** (0.10)	0.74*** (0.10)	0.68** (0.11)	0.73*** (0.10)	0.56*** (0.11)
N	862	861	861	862	862

Figure 5: Pre-war evictions and violence during the war



In villages with a local branch of the *Unió de Rabassaires*, the expected number of civilian deaths was 1.87 where there were no evictions and 3.55 in villages with twenty evictions. The equivalent figures for villages without a local branch of the *rabassaire* union were 1.29 with no evictions and 2.42 with twenty evictions. So the presence of the union increases is associated with an elevated number of civilian deaths and a magnified effect of evictions on violence. It is possible that at least part of the violence was conducted collectively through local organizations.

The other variables associated with violence against civilians during the war were mostly non-significant. The exception is the competitiveness of the 1936 parliamentary elections, which remains the most relevant explanatory variable in the model, in line with Balcells (2010, 2011, 2017). The models also show that variables associated with the theory that connects control of territory and presence of opposition to violence are either not significant – this is the case with the variable *borderfront* – or significant but in the opposite direction, as in

the case of right-wing vote. This is probably because the Spanish Civil War, unlike most contemporary civil wars, was a conventional war. This meant that divided control of the territory between the warring parties and informational problems about the presence of opposition to each warring party's rule were much less common than in unconventional, guerrilla forms of war. Behind the battlefield, rear areas were mostly under the control of one of the warring parties. According to Kalyvas (2006), in these areas, where the control of the territory by one of the warring parties is complete, there is no violence against civilians.

It seems, therefore, that there is a measurable effect of pre-war grievances measured in terms of evictions of *rabassaires* in 1935, a year before the outbreak of the civil war, and violence against civilians during the war. This effect was stronger in villages where the *rabassaire* union had a local branch, which suggest that political entrepreneurs could have played a role in mobilizing and politicizing the grievances. We now report some robustness checks. We estimate the models with two different dependent

variables. The first is the number of civilian deaths, and the second is the number of villages with at least one civilian death. We report the results for the first variable, as it is the most relevant one for the theory. The results for the second variable are similar, but with slightly different magnitudes.

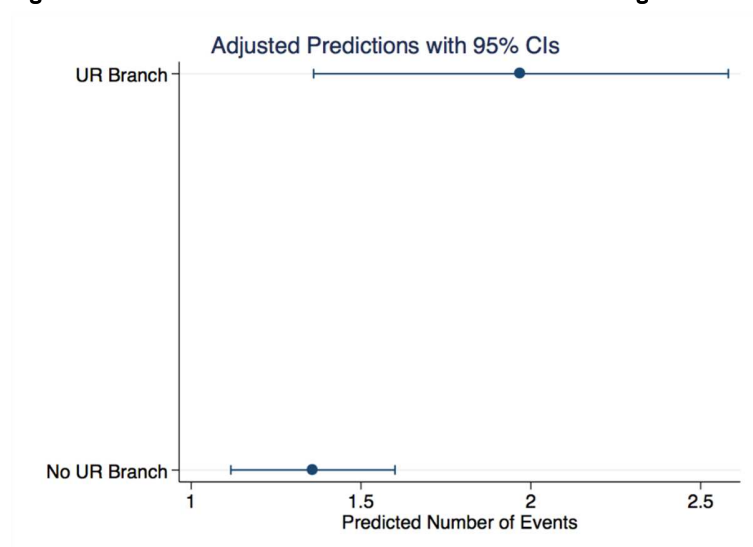
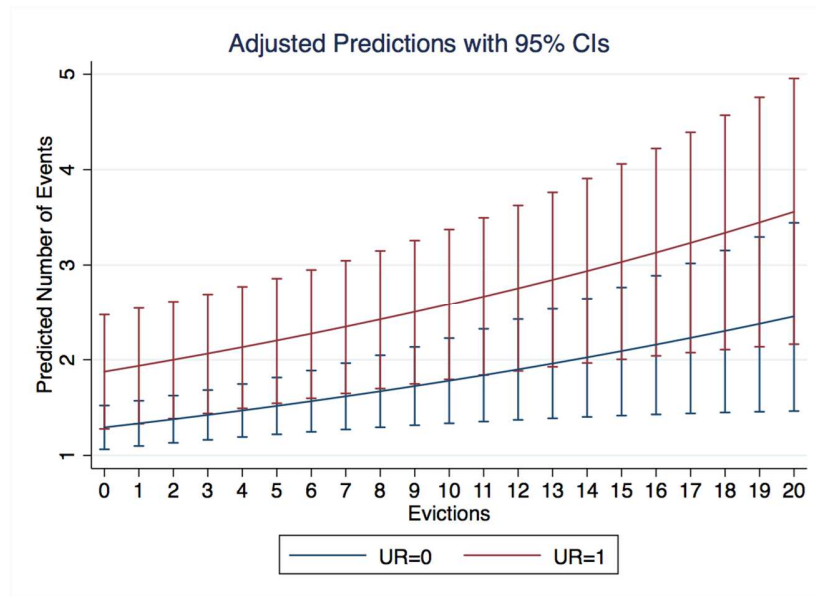
Figure 6: Presence of *rabassaire* union branch and violence against civilians

Figure 7: Pre-war grievances and violence in villages with and without a local branch of sharecroppers' union



variables: total number of people executed including anticlerical violence, and our original dependent variable excluding outliers.

The results of the robustness checks are shown in Figure 8, which shows the predicted number of people killed for a model that includes anti-clerical violence (left-hand side) and a model that excludes two outliers with an exceptionally high number of rabassaires evicted in 1935 (the villages of Amposta and Tortosa). The results largely confirm those of the previous models: evictions of rabassaires significantly increase the expected number of people killed in the first months of the civil war. The interaction effect of the presence of a local branch of the rabassaire union and pre-war grievances on vio-

lence also holds in the models estimated with these two dependent variables, as can be seen in Figure 9.

6. Micro Dynamics of Local Violence against Civilians

We have seen that pre-war grievances around property rights experienced by sharecroppers in Catalonia in the years prior to the Spanish Civil War did indeed have an effect on violence against civilians during the war. In villages where rabassaires were evicted in the year prior to the outbreak of the civil war, violence against civilians was higher. In this section we provide more detail on the connection between pre-war grievances and violence against landowners in Catalan villages during the first months of the civil war.

Figure 8: Prediction with different dependent variables

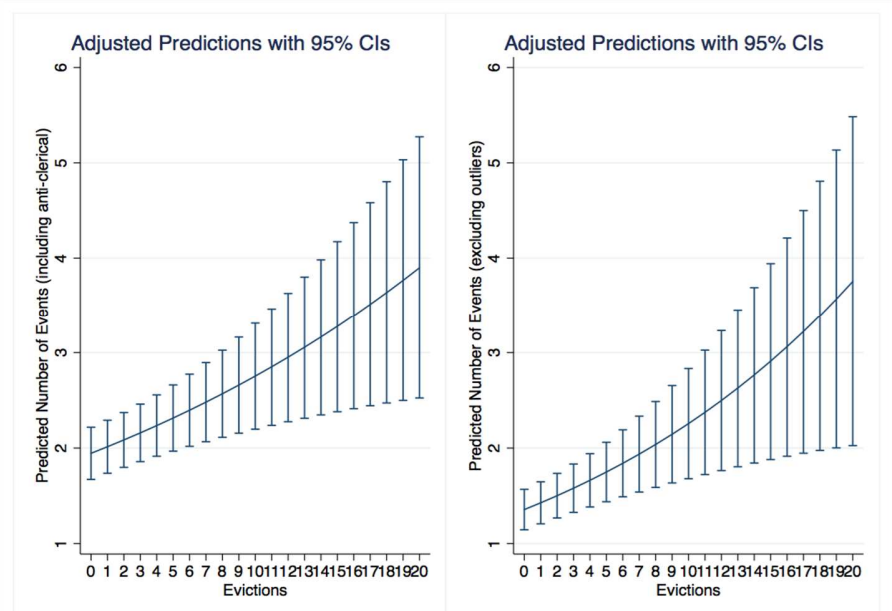
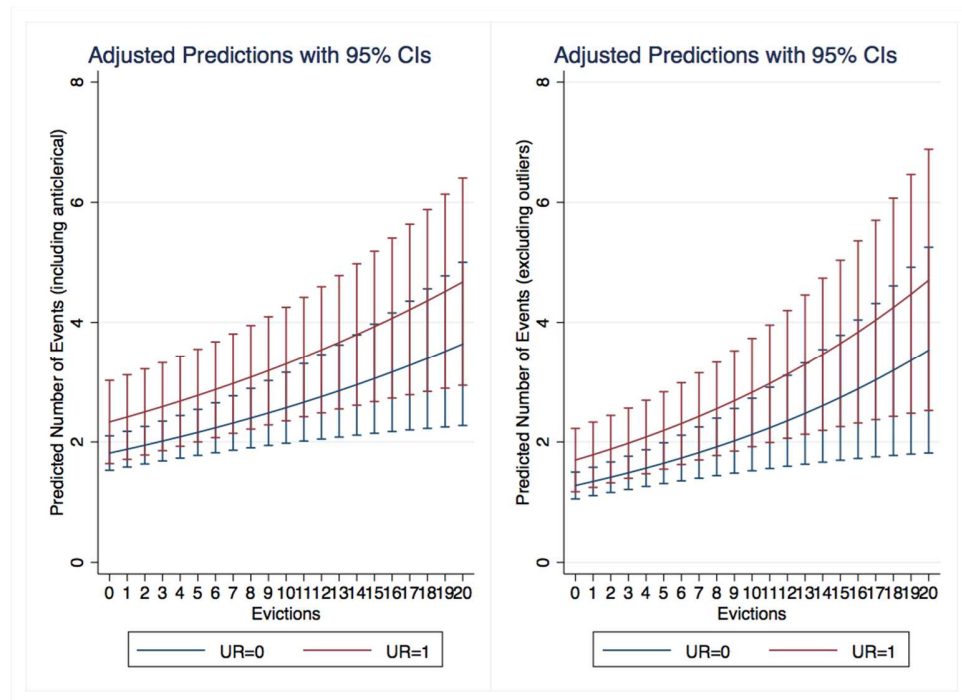


Figure 9. Effect of the presence of UR and pre-war grievances with different dependent variables



By combining Solé i Sabatè and Vilarroya's (1990) data on the names of civilian deaths with the data about the names of the landowners who evicted sharecroppers collected by the Unió de Rabassaires (1935) we are able to identify 28 out of 502 (5.57 percent) landowners who evicted sharecroppers in 1934–35 that were killed in the period July–November 1936. Further evidence on violence perpetrated by rabassaires can be obtained from the files of the Causa General (General Case) compiled by the Francoist authorities. The Francoist authorities had an obvious interest in maximizing the crimes committed by the Republicans during the war, so the Causa General has to be interpreted cautiously as it is likely to suffer upward bias. However, it remains an important source quantifying violence against civilians in the territory under the control of the Republic, and all historical analyses on violence during the Spanish Civil War (including Solé i Sabatè and Vilarroya 1990) use it extensively, even if they cross-check the data on civilian deaths with registry office data and exclude soldiers killed in action that are sometimes included as civilian victims. We used it to see whether there was any mention of evicted sharecroppers

as members of local revolutionary committees or participants in violence against civilians in places where landowners who evicted sharecroppers in 1934–35 were killed.

There were executions of landowners who had evicted sharecroppers in twenty-one Catalan villages. The Causa General does not provide any information about four of these villages. Of the remaining seventeen, we have found that evicted rabassaires were mentioned as participants in the local revolutionary committees and/or as presumed perpetrators of violence against civilians, looting and destruction of ecclesiastical property in eleven, while there was no mention of evicted rabassaires in the case of six of the villages. In the town of Arbaca, four of evicted sharecroppers were members of the local revolutionary committee that, according to the Causa General, was directly responsible for crimes committed in the village. In Batea, an evicted rabassaire was a member of the new town council and apparently “took part directly or indirectly in all the crimes committed”. Evicted sharecroppers were also mentioned as responsible for crimes, and in some cases also as members of the local revolutionary committee or town council

of Brull, Fontrubí, Gandesa (where one evicted rabassaire was accused of being the leader of “death patrols”), Mediona, Prat de Compte (where one evicted rabassaire was accused of “several assassinations”) and Sant Martí Sarroca. In villages such as Castelví de la Marca, Fontrubí and Olérdola, “*rabassaire* leaders” were accused of cooperating with the local Revolutionary Committee in the assassination of landowners. In other villages, such as Mediona, San Sadurní and Subirats, again according to the Causa General files, landowners only avoided being murdered by the local peasants because they fled to Francoist territory.⁶ In the town of Tordera, one evicted sharecropper was considered “morally or politically responsible for the criminal acts committed after 18 July 1936”. In Moia, one evicted rabassaire was a member of the local revolutionary committee, although the Causa General files do not make any allegations about involvement in a specific crime, apart from explicitly assuming that the revolutionary committee was responsible for all crimes committed during the Republican period. In the village of Cubelles, where four rabassaires were evicted in 1935, the local branch of the rabassaire union UR was considered responsible for the crimes committed – including the assassination of an evicting landowner – as member of the local council. All this evidence from the Causa General, even if, as already mentioned, it has to be interpreted cautiously, at least shows that some of the rabassaires evicted in the year prior to the outbreak of the civil war occupied relevant positions in the revolutionary organizations that were largely in charge of villages where some landowners that had evicted rabassaires in 1935 were assassinated in the first months of the war. For many of these rabassaires, the evictions would have been very traumatic, especially given that in some cases they had been working the same land for a very long time. The evicted sharecroppers considered responsible for violence against civilians and destruction of property in the Causa General held *rabassa morta* contracts whose duration, according to the *Unió de Rabbassaires* (1935) ranged from four years in some cases up to seventy years in one case (in

the town of Sant Martí Sarroca) and to “time immemorial” in the case of one evicted sharecropper in the town of Brull.

7. Conclusions

The case of contested property rights in Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War shows a non-negligible effect of pre-war grievances on violence against civilians during the war. While most investigations into violence against civilians in civil wars stress the role of endogenous factors, especially control of territory in non-conventional civil wars, our result vindicates to a certain extent the idea that pre-war grievances can partly explain violence against civilians during civil wars. Although we cannot directly extrapolate these results to civil wars in general, they certainly offer some clues about when and how economic inequality, exploitation and social discrimination can affect violence against civilians in civil wars. When these grievances are intensely mobilized in the immediate pre-war period and state authority partially collapses (which is quite common in most – but not all – civil wars), pre-war grievances have the potential to unleash violence during the war. Our article shows that violence associated with state collapse is not just caused by dynamics of the war itself, such as wartime revenge and common criminality, but is also the consequence of cycles of grievance and revenge initiated before the outbreak of the war.

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⁶ Source: Archivo Histórico Nacional http://pares.mcu.es/Pares-Busquedas/servlets/Control_servlet?accion=3&txt_id_desc_ud=2600914&fromagenda=1&txt_primer-Contiene=1

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